

4/8/13

Presentation to CoA Commission on Immigrant Affairs

- Introduce self
- Distribute Caritas 2013 FACT SHEET
- Very brief overview of Caritas services
 - o “Let me give you some background on our work at Caritas.”
 - o Preliminary talking points:
 - Caritas sees few persons who are considered undocumented.
 - When we do see them, they come in for homeless prevention services (i.e. rent or utility assistance) and/or residency assistance.
 - Caritas does serve, as mentioned earlier, refugees. Served 509 refugees from 9 different countries last year (including large numbers from Cuba).
 - The predominant request we get is for EADs (Employment Authorization Documents) and permanent residency for parolees (e.g. Cuban border crossers).
 - We have received 137 such requests in the last 18 months.
 - We partner with RAICES, Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services who house an attorney in our office.

We were asked to respond to 3 key questions for this meeting.

1. What barriers exist to the immigrant population?

- o Limited English proficiency
- o Limited job skills and resulting lack of job readiness
- o Large families with housing challenges (2013 rent in Austin forecasted to increase 4.6%)
- o Lack of funds to pay for legal assistance
- o Employers tend to be overly cautious in hiring even if immigration documents are in order
- o Lapses in renewing immigration documentation results in job losses
- o Job instability (working “under the table” is very fragile)

2. What needs do you see for the immigrant population?

- o ESL – limits and/or prevents access to resources and better jobs
- o Job readiness training
 - Many are working full-time, yet unable to pay rent.
 - Another example is that there are so many immigrants who do not qualify for food stamps and are still very poor.
- o Better education of both immigrants and employers on the immigration process.

3. How can CoA (City of Austin) be of assistance to immigrants?

- Provide housing support – e.g. access to public housing
- Create funding for vocational training
- Fund ESL, especially vocational ESL which is a proven effective model
- Assist them in accessing medical care
- Assist them in identifying support systems in the community
- Provide support and access to the school system. Fund school system to train educators on cultural competency and interpretation as it pertains to immigrant students.

- Example: In the case of a 17 year old immigrant student who had special needs and totally illiterate, the school system ignored referral from social services and mainstreamed him. It was ultimately resolved via legal and social service efforts to transfer him to another school where he is now receiving appropriate services.